

Decision Regarding the Assessment of the Social Sciences Programme Group

Tallinn University of Technology

15/09/2016

The Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher Education and VET decided to approve the report by the Assessment Committee and to conduct the next quality assessment of the Social Sciences study programme group in the first and second cycles of higher education at Tallinn University of Technology in seven years, with a secondary condition

On the basis of the following references: subsections 12² (1) and 10 (4) of the Universities Act, point 3.7.3 of the Statutes of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher Education and VET (hereinafter referred to as 'EKKA'), points 41.1 and 42 of the document, 'Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups in the First and Second Cycles of Higher Education', authorised in point 3.7.1 of the above-mentioned EKKA Statutes, and clauses 53 (1) 2) and 53 (2) 2) and 3) of the Administrative Procedure Act; the Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education of EKKA (hereinafter referred to as 'the Council') affirms the following:

1. On 4.05.2015 Tallinn University of Technology and EKKA agreed upon a time frame to conduct the quality assessment of the study programme group.
2. The Director of EKKA, by her order on 06.05.2016, approved the following membership of the quality assessment committee for the Social Sciences study programme group in the first and second cycles of higher education at the University of Tartu, Tallinn University of Technology and Tallinn University (hereinafter referred to as 'the Committee'):

David Inglis, Chair	Professor of Sociology, Department of Sociology, Philosophy and Anthropology, University of Exeter (United Kingdom)
Heikki Hiilamo	Professor of Social Policy, University of Helsinki (Finland)
Jonas Hinnfors	PhD, Professor of Political Science, Department of Political Science, University of Gothenburg (Sweden)

Florian Rampelt	Student, University of Passau (Germany)
Margus Sarapuu	Head of Task Force on Zero Bureaucracy, Ministry of Economics and Communication (Estonia)
Mati Vaarmann	Ambassador (Estonia)
Gediminas Vitkus	Professor and Head of European Studies Department, Institute of International Relations and Political Science (Lithuania)
Brigita Zepa	Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Latvia; Director of Baltic Institute of Social Sciences (Latvia)

3. Tallinn University of Technology submitted the following programmes for evaluation under this study programme group:

International Relations (BA)

International Relations and European-Asian Studies (MA)

4. Tallinn University of Technology submitted a self-evaluation report to the EKKA Bureau on 9.02.2016 and the assessment coordinator forwarded it to the Committee on 5.04.2016.
5. An assessment visit was made to Tallinn University of Technology on 13.05.2016.
6. The Committee sent its draft assessment report to the EKKA Bureau on 25.06.2016, EKKA forwarded it to Tallinn University of Technology for its comments on 4.07.2016, and the University delivered its response on 8.07.2016.
7. The Committee submitted its final assessment report to the EKKA Bureau on 19.08.2016. That assessment report is an integral part of the decision, and is available on the EKKA website.
8. The Secretary of the Council forwarded the Committee's final assessment report along with the University's self-evaluation report to the Council members on 31.08.2016.
9. The Council with 8 members present discussed these received documents in its session on 15.09.2016 and, based on the assessment report, decided to point out the following strengths, areas for improvement, and recommendations regarding the Social Sciences study programme group in the first and second cycles of higher education at Tallinn University of Technology.

Assessment at the Level of the Study Programme Group

Strengths

- A clear and unique strength of these study programmes in Estonia is the staff competence in Asia-Pacific studies. The decision to combine the MA programmes in International Relations and in European-Asian Studies was certainly correct, with regard to the attractiveness of programmes. The transition to providing instruction entirely in English was also a positive step,

which will create prerequisites for further consolidating and internationalising the study programmes, as well as for improving the quality of studies.

- Tallinn University of Technology (TUT) has a very large network of international cooperation, which is also beneficial for students.
- Some members of the teaching staff participate in very high-quality international research and development projects (e.g. Network on Multilingualism, Asian Studies Competence Centre, Around the Caspian, etc.).
- The Department hosts lecture series in which ambassadors and other high-ranking representatives from several international organisations deliver regular presentations to the students.
- The international student body (from 15 countries) has created a diverse learning environment for intercultural communications in practice.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

- For the sake of coherence of the study programmes, a critical look at the list of compulsory (natural science) courses should be taken.
- Students should be provided with better opportunities for international mobility (including internships) within the framework of the study programmes.
- Access to international journals should be improved.
- Programme managers should give more attention to the implementation of modern teaching methods, which so far has not been considered to be a priority. Student feedback reveals that the quality of teaching varies by study programme.
- International students have difficulty in finding internship placements in Estonia. Working relationships with organisations appropriate to internships should be developed, paying particular attention to the non-governmental sector. Due to a lack of information in English, international students are not involved in extra-curricular activities.
- An appropriate balance between teaching and research functions should be ensured with regard to the workload of teaching staff.
- Contacts with alumni should be strengthened.

Assessment at the Study Programme Level

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS (BA)

Areas for improvement and recommendations

- Since a clear and unique strength of the study programme group in Estonia is the staff competence in Asia-Pacific studies, it is recommended that students already focus their research on that region at the BA level.

- It is advisable to reshape or completely eliminate some compulsory courses which do not contribute to achieving the general objectives of the study programme (e.g. Working Environment and Ergonomics). This especially applies to the General Studies module. It is also advisable to combine courses in the programme making them more comprehensive and offering more ECTS credits.
- The programme managers should increase their efforts to detect academic cheating and plagiarism, since not enough attention is paid to this, according to students.
- In some cases the staff members of the programme should be more active in research.
- More attention should be given to development of pedagogical skills of the teaching staff in the programme.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND EUROPEAN-ASIAN STUDIES (MA)

Areas for improvement and recommendations

- It is necessary to continue to work on making clearer distinctions between BA and MA programmes and on avoiding overlaps. The analytical components of the study programme should be strengthened.
 - Additional attention should be given to the quality of MA theses, since the requirements for and distinctions between BA and MA theses are currently not clear, based on the samples of theses examined. The MA theses should involve significantly more independent student work and demonstrate the students' research skills.
 - Since thesis supervisors are overloaded with work, the role and content of Master's seminars should be expanded.
- 10.** Point 41 of the document, 'Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups in the First and Second Cycles of Higher Education', establishes that the Quality Assessment Council shall approve an assessment report within three months after receipt of the report. The Council shall weigh the strengths, areas for improvement, and recommendations pointed out in the assessment report, and then shall decide whether to conduct the next quality assessment of that study programme group in seven, five or three years.
- 11.** The Council weighed the strengths, areas for improvement, and recommendations referred to in point 9 of this document and found that the study programmes, the teaching conducted under these programmes, and development activities regarding teaching and learning conform to the requirements if the University eliminates the following shortcomings:
- The designed learning outcomes of the MA programme in International Relations and European-Asian Studies are currently not sufficiently distinguishable from the BA-level learning outcomes as described in Annex 1 point 1.1. of the Government of the Republic Regulation, 'Standard of Higher Education' (and from the intended learning outcomes of the BA programme in International Relations). For example, the requirements for and distinctions between BA and MA theses are currently not clear, based on the samples of theses examined. The MA theses should involve significantly more independent student work and demonstrate the students' research

skills, in order to ensure attainment of the learning outcomes described in Annex 1 point 3.1 of the 'Standard of Higher Education'.

- The study programmes do not sufficiently pay attention to the use of modern teaching methods; therefore the teaching process does not fully contribute to achieving the objectives of the programme as defined in subsection 6 (5) of the 'Standard of Higher Education'.
 - Since international students have difficulty in finding internship placements in Estonia, effective application of their knowledge and skills in the working environment is not ensured within these programmes as defined in subsections 5 (3) and 6 (6) of the 'Standard of Higher Education'. Working relationships with organisations appropriate to internships should be developed, paying particular attention to the non-governmental sector.
12. According to clause 53 (1) 2) of the Administrative Procedure Act, a secondary condition of an administrative act is an additional duty related to the principal regulation of the administrative act, and according to clause 53 (1) 3) it is also a supplementary condition for the creation of a right arising from the principal regulation of the administrative act. Clauses 53 (2) 2) and 3) establish that a secondary condition may be imposed on an administrative act if the administrative act cannot be issued without the secondary condition, or if issue of the administrative act must be resolved on the basis of an administrative right of discretion. The Council found that, without a secondary condition, the next quality assessment of the study programme group should be conducted in less than seven years, and, on the basis of points 41.1 and 42 of the document, 'Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups in the First and Second Cycles of Higher Education',

DECIDED

to approve the assessment report and to conduct the next quality assessment of the Social Sciences study programme group in the first and second cycles of higher education at Tallinn University of Technology in seven years with the following secondary condition:

No later than 15.09.2017, Tallinn University of Technology shall submit an action plan and a progress report to the Council on eliminating the shortcomings referred to in point 11 of this document.

The decision was adopted by 8 votes in favour. Against 0.

13. In case Tallinn University of Technology does not comply with the secondary condition by the due date, the Council will repeal this assessment decision and set a new date for a quality assessment of the study programme group, or establish a new secondary condition.
14. The Council proposes that Tallinn University will submit an action plan to EKKA with regard to the areas for improvement and recommendations pointed out in the report no later than 15.09.2017.
15. A person who finds that his or her rights are violated or his or her freedoms are restricted by this decision may file a challenge with the EKKA Quality Assessment Council within 30 days after the person filing the challenge became or should have become aware of the contested finding. A judicial challenge to the decision may be submitted within 30 days after its delivery, filing an action with the Tallinn courthouse of the Tallinn Administrative Court pursuant to the procedure provided for in the Code of Administrative Court Procedure.

Tõnu Meidla
Chair of the Council

Hillar Bauman
Secretary of the Council

